



## Original Articles

# Enhancing global health and education in Malawi, Zambia, and the United States through an interprofessional global health exchange program



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## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** This article describes participant outcomes of an interprofessional collaboration between health professionals and faculty in Malawi, Zambia, and the United States (US).

**Background:** One strategy critical for improving global health and addressing Millennium Development goals is promotion of interprofessional education and collaboration.

**Methods:** Program participants included 25 health professionals from Malawi and Zambia, and 19 faculty/health professionals from Alabama and California. African Fellows participated in a 2 week workshop on Interprofessional Education in Alabama followed by 2 weeks working on individual goals with faculty collaborators/mentors. The US Fellows also spent 2 weeks visiting their counterparts in Malawi and Zambia to develop plans for sustainable partnerships.

**Results/Conclusions:** Program evaluations demonstrated participants' satisfaction with the program and indicated that the program promoted interprofessional and cross-cultural understanding; fostered development of long-term sustainable partnerships between health professionals and educators in Zambia and the US; and created increased awareness and use of resources for global health education.

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## 1. Introduction

In this era of increasing connectedness and globalization, it is essential to develop sustainable partnerships to address global health and development needs. In fact, one of the eight Millennium Development goals calls for development of global partnerships for development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012). Protecting and improving global health has become a priority for foreign policy agendas of countries throughout the world, since poor health is often associated with threats to national and global security (Chan, Store, & Kouchner, 2008; Labonté & Gagnon,

2010; World Health Organization, 2007). One strategy that has been identified as critical for improving health at the local, national, and global levels is the promotion of interprofessional education and collaboration (Frenk et al., 2010; Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011; World Health Organization, 2010). This article describes a Professional Global Health Fellowship program that was supported by the US Department of State (US Department of State, 2009) and designed to promote sustainable interprofessional collaborations between Malawi, Zambia, and the US in order to strengthen health professional education and ultimately contribute to improving local and global health outcomes. The specific goals of the program were to: (1) Address global health needs by strengthening education of health care providers through professional development fellowships for 25 educators and health professionals from Zambia and Malawi, focusing on interprofessional educational strategies and resources, use of communication to address public health needs, and preparing health professionals to meet health needs of marginalized populations; (2) Provide opportunities for reciprocal fellowships in Malawi and Zambia for 19 faculty in the health professions at three US institutions: University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), Samford University McWhorter School of Pharmacy (MSP), and University of California San Francisco (UCSF); and (3) Promote mutual understanding and sustainable partnerships between key professional groups in the US and selected community and health organizations

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and counterpart groups in Zambia and Malawi. The article describes the core components of the program and results of the program evaluation, and presents reflections of the program impact by the program coordinators in Malawi (Chimwaza) and Zambia (Ngoma). The article concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and implications for development of future programs to promote partnerships to strengthen interprofessional education and practice in global health.

## 2. Description of the program

The Global Health Fellows Program was part of a larger Professional Exchange program supported by the US State Department, which also included Climate Change, Legislative, Education-to-Employment, and Food Security Fellows (United States Department of State, 2012). The project was funded for 2 years beginning in September 2010. The main phases of the project included: (a) selection of African Fellows and their US counterparts; (b) pre-departure orientation and planning; (c) African Fellows' visits to the US; and (d) US Fellows' visits to Africa.

### 2.1. Selection of fellows

Advisory committees were formed in Malawi and Zambia to work with the in-country coordinators (Ngoma and Chimwaza) to recruit and select the African Fellows. These committees worked with the Public Affairs Desks at the US Embassies in Zambia and Malawi, or their designees, in making the final Fellows selections. The criteria for selection included: (a) working as a faculty member in one of the health professions, or as a health care provider in selected partner institutions (including the University of Zambia, National Institute of Public Administration in Zambia, University of Malawi, and the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance in Malawi); (b) interest in developing sustainable partnerships with faculty at UAB, MSP, or UCSF to enhance global health education for students; and (c) commitment to participate in all fellowship activities if selected. After the 13 Zambian and 12 Malawian Fellows were selected, program coordinators at UAB, MSP, and UCSF identified partner faculty members in their respective institutions.

## 3. Pre-departure orientation and planning

Once the Fellows were selected, program coordinators provided pre-departure orientation sessions and manuals with information about the program, health and educational systems, and culture in the partner countries, as well as information about securing visas and making travel plans. The orientation program emphasized the importance of developing sustainable interprofessional partnerships to promote long-term collaboration after the end of the fellowship.

## 4. African fellows' visits to the United States

The African Fellows visited the US in two separate cohorts. The first cohort of 6 Zambian and 6 Malawian Fellows visited the US in April/May 2011, and the second cohort of 7 Zambian and 6 Malawian Fellows visited the US in October/November 2011. The US visits included 3 components: (a) a 3-day Fellows Congress in Washington, D.C.; (b) a 2-week workshop on Interprofessional Education held at UAB; and (c) a 2-week mentoring period held at UAB or MSP for Zambian Fellows and at UCSF for Malawian Fellows.

### 4.1. Fellows congress in Washington, D.C.

The purpose of each 3-day Fellows Congress was to provide an opportunity for nearly 250 Fellows from multiple countries and representing different disciplines to interact, to visit key cultural and historical sites in Washington, D.C., and to learn first-hand about US governmental global initiatives. Figure 1 is a photograph of the first cohort of Malawian and Zambian Fellows visiting the Washington monument during the Fellows congress.

### 4.2. Two-week interprofessional education workshop

Figure 2 lists the objectives and key topics addressed during the 2-week interprofessional education workshop that was held at UAB. The workshop was coordinated by one of the authors (Somerrall) but involved participation from multiple UAB faculty representing diverse disciplines (health professions, medicine, public health, and nursing). Fellows worked together in interprofessional teams throughout the



Fig. 1. Zambian and Malawian Fellows at Washington Monument, October 2011.

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